

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

INK ON PAPER

Like a Child

By: Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

Elisha ben Avuyah said: "One who learns as a child, to what is it like? Like ink written on fresh paper. One who learns as an old man, to what is it like? Like ink written on erased paper."

This curious mishna appears in the fourth chapter of Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers; it's either mishna 20, 24 or 25, depending on which version you're using).

The first part serves as encouragement for the youth: Carpe diem! When you are young and do not yet have the responsibilities that family brings with it, you have time and the presence of mind to learn Torah! Your study will be like ink written on fresh paper -- clear, pristine & sharp.

The second part seems to discourage an older person from study. Even if you do study, it will be like ink written on erased paper -- blotchy, muddled, and unclear.

If, for whatever reason, I did not study while young, should I despair of ever succeeding in my Torah study?

Is this Mishna discouraging older people from Torah study?!

One of the foremost commentaries on Avos, Midrash Shmuel, posits that the Mishna is offering words of



encouragement to older people. Although it's true that your "piece of paper" is old and has had much written on it -- but you can erase it. And the eraser will work well. Hence, the Mishna states that your study will be like "ink written on erased paper."

The Rebbe offers another layer of understanding. Rather than reading the "child" and "old man" as chronological terms, perhaps they can be understood as referring to a mindset.

"One who learns as a child" -- that is, with the approach of a child -- "to what is it like? Like ink written on fresh paper."

Learning as a child means to make oneself small, setting aside one's sense of self. Every text is approached with the fresh excitement of a child experiencing something for the first time.

"One who learns as an old man" -- that is, thinking that they are experienced, accomplished and wise -- "to what is it like? Like ink written on erased paper." It is not clear and crisp, having been clouded by one's own ego.

The Mishna is not discouraging anyone from Torah study; quite the opposite! Everyone is encouraged to study -- like a child!

Did you ever observe a child exploring a new place, learn a new word or try something for the first time?


A child approaches everything with a fresh sense of curiosity and eagerness to learn. Their ego has not been developed and thus is not mixed in.

Perhaps this can also explain why Rambam, in his codification of the Laws of Torah Study, does not begin with one's own obligation to learn, but with one's obligation to teach his children.

Likewise, Rambam counts the verse in this week's parsha, Va'eschanan, "And you shall teach it to your children," as the source for the Mitzvah to learn Torah (even though there are other verses that speak of one's personal obligation to study Torah).

The foundation of all Torah study is to be like a child. Success in Torah study comes only when one approaches the text with the sparkling heart and mind of a child.

Like ink on fresh paper.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos vol.19, Va'Eschanan sicha 1, p.43) 

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Shining From Within

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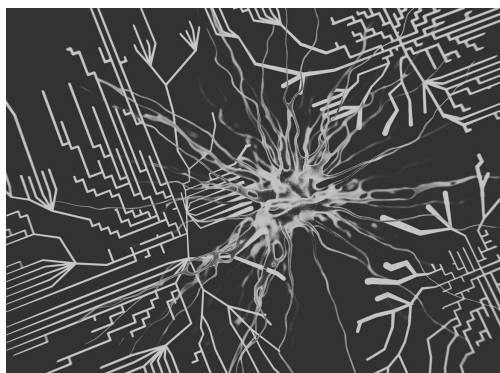
You can't enjoy the glow of sunlight while denying that the sun itself exists. Even though the sun is always shining, with some good blinds you might be able to block out the light if you wanted to take a nap mid-afternoon.

This is NOT how our relationship works with The One Above. There is no option for a black out shade. It says in Devarim (4:39) *"And you shall know...in your heart that...Gd in heaven above, and upon the earth below; there is none else."*

The Lubavitcher Rebbe posits that each detail is of utter relevance. Though you might think that *Ein Od - There is none else* - is an "umbrella statement" that includes everything, there must be a reason that the verse ALSO specifies the *Heavens* and the *Earth*.

While the Earth may look like an independent entity, a spiritual soul will be able to perceive order within the chaos. But that is not enough - the Torah wants us to "know" (not just believe or feel) the Being of All Beings.

As humans, we can't help but see a distinction between the celestial worlds and shopping centers, traffic jams or even majestic mountains. Since the physical world doesn't always feel so Gdly, the Torah gives the extra words *"upon the earth below"* - the same Oneness up there is down here!



It's NOT that Hashem is shining His Radiance on the land - the Creator of All Creators is deeply embedded within each and every particle of existence. As all the little the children know, Hashem is here; Hashem is there; Hashem is truly everywhere.

(based on Likkutei Sichos Vol. 29 V'Estchana sicha 1)

HAYOM YOM

15 Menachem Av

From my father's notes: The superior quality of 15 Av over the fifteenth of every other month is this: The fifteenth represents the visible completeness (of the moon), but (the moon) is still only a recipient¹ (of light). However, on 15 Av the light is firmly fixed in it, for the ascent is in reverse proportion to the drastic descent of Tisha B'Av...

This then is the meaning of "The sun's power is weakened" (on 15 Av after its summer intensity). The idolators calculate their calendar by the sun of evil, which on the 15th is weakened... In the days of the Sanctuary they (the nations) were subservient to Shlomo (King Solomon); certainly it shall be so in the Time-to-Come when "(the nations) will flow to Him"² in a state of total bitul (nullification), and "I will remove the spirit of impurity etc." A token of this is expressed on the 15th of Av when the sun is weakened...

Chassidic Story

(continued from last week)

R' Moshe Leib Sossover volunteered to be imprisoned by the greedy Poritz in the place of a Jewish inn-keeper who fell behind in rent payments. The Poritz became gravely ill and sought to free the Tzdaik in hopes of being cured from his sudden illness. When his messenger tried to release R' Moshe, the holy Rabbi refused the offer.

"The Jew refuses to come, reported the messenger, "he says that his freedom will not help the innkeeper. The Rabbi demands that you cancel all the outstanding debt due to the the suffering you have cause the inn keeper."

The Poritz agreed, but nonetheless the R' Moshe Leib refused release once again. "The Jew says that canceling the debt is not enough. Your rent is so high that innkeeper is likely to fall into debt again," the messenger shared. Finally with superhuman effort the Poritz managed to cough up an offer of cancelling all debts and giving the inn rent free for the entire year. R' Moshe Leib agreed to the conditions and was released from prison.

The Poritz was greatly relieved to see R' Moshe Leib and begged his forgiveness. The Tzadik thanked him and suggested that after the year of free rent he reduce the monthly fee. This way the innkeeper would be able to keep up with the payments. This would also compensate the family for all their pain and suffering.

The Poritz duly agreed to the new terms. A contract was signed which reduced the rent by half and precluded imprisonment or any bodily harm if payment were late. The Poritz's sickness disappeared as suddenly as it had attacked him.

R' Moshe Leib shared the news with the innkeeper & his family. They greatly rejoiced with the good tidings.

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